

**Community Voices/Budget Choice Facilitation Committee**  
**August 7, 2008 Meeting Minutes**  
**Police Department Conference Room**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m by co-chair Martha Hanner.

Present were committee members Isaac Ben Ezra, Alison Donta-Venman, Stanley Gawle, Martha Hanner, Jerry Jolly (arrived late), Irv Rhodes, Katherine Vorwerk Feldman.

Also present were Rob Detweiler ( Director of Finance and Operations for the school system), John Musante (liaison from the Town Manager's office), Stephanie O'Keeffe (Select Board member), Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Andy Steinberg (liaison from the Budget Coordination Group), and Helen Vivian (acting Co-Superintendent for the school aystem.)

**Agenda:**

1. Select rotating secretary for minutes
2. Approval of Minutes, July 31
3. Approval of Minutes, July 17
4. Town Govt. Efficiency Study – Larry Shaffer
5. Discussion of Outreach Plan
  - What are our goals?
  - What approach(es) should we take?
6. Revenue Scenarios: Questions and discussion
7. Set time for Outreach Subcommittee meeting
8. Adjourn

The meeting opened with a discussion of minute taking for this meeting. Kathy Vorwerk Feldman volunteered to take the minutes (alphabetical rotation.) The minutes of the July 17th meeting were then approved. The minutes of the July 31st meeting, including additional budget and service projections provided by the school system, will be considered at the August 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. Andy Steinberg will make all corrections on approved but as yet unposted minutes and send them to John Musante for posting.

The Town Manager, Larry Shaffer, then described the Town's recent efforts to compress costs by finding more efficient means to deliver Town services. (See attached outline of presentation.) He described four specific initiatives: The formation of a Blue Ribbon Efficiency Committee; consolidation of departments; regionalization of services and activities with the colleges, University, and neighboring towns ; and various efforts to expand the consolidation of technology.

*Blue Ribbon Committee.* The Committee is made up of three individuals not affiliated with the Town government who have business/management expertise. They are focusing on topics such as the number of Town, school, and library administrators, whether administrators could be shared, and whether there could be a consolidation of functions/services.

Andy Steinberg asked about the in-house Health Insurance Committee and the question of switching to GIC coverage. Shaffer responded that the Town's health insurance trust is in much better shape than it was two years ago, with a positive balance of over two million dollars. The administrative Health Insurance Committee continues to monitor the costs. He said that switching to the GIC plan may be cost-effective in the long term, but right now it is more expensive. If the switch were to be made, the Town would need at least two million dollars to cover filing of prior claims, hence the importance of building up a surplus in the trust fund.

*Consolidation.* There has been progress on all consolidation fronts. Some consolidation has been with the schools. Some Town departments have been merged. Some departments have been physically relocated for the sake of efficiency. Shaffer will provide us with a summary sheet of changes and estimated cost savings, including full cost accounting for Cherry Hill Golf Course.

*Regionalization.*

- A. Police agreement with UMass. Ground work for future benefit has been laid.
- B. Fire/Ambulance. Trying to increase revenue streams is difficult. Things are going pretty well.
- C. Regional Dispatch. 911 State bill will pay for start up and subsidize the operation using money from the cell phone tax, if the region has at least 3 municipalities. Region would include UMass which is considered a municipality.
- D. Veteran's Services. We have a contract with Pelham to share Veteran's Services and are in discussion with other towns. Reimbursement comes from the federal government.
- E. Assessing and Inspection Services. The State encourages regionalization of these services and conversations are taking place.

The Manager ended his presentation by saying that he would provide our Committee with a summary of his remarks. The Committee thanked Mr. Shaffer for his time with us.

Martha Hanner, in her capacity as a member of the outreach subcommittee, then passed out for discussion a sheet listing goals and questions related to the outreach subcommittee which has not yet had an opportunity to meet. (Appended to these minutes.) Isaac Ben Ezra said that we as a Committee should review the issue of reimbursements to the Town by the University and colleges for Town services and then present our findings and conclusions to the public as part of our presentation. A discussion ensued as to what we should present on this topic and what our responsibility was. More information will be requested from the Town Manager.

The discussion then moved on to how we should collect input from the public and how we reach the maximum number of people. Martha Hanner suggested that we use a questionnaire type format and ask specific questions about budget and service preferences. Irv Rhodes raised the question of whether we should be trying to get a statistically representative sample. A discussion about whether this was possible and affordable took place. Alison Donta-Venman pointed out that identifying a representative sample does not mean that those people will actually respond. Martha

Hanner suggested that our goal should be to give everyone the opportunity to respond. There was general consensus that we would not do a mass mailing or phone survey, in large part because of the cost. John Musante stated that no money has been budgeted for our Committee, but staff time is available.

We decided to recommend to the Outreach Committee that they use the following to communicate with the Amherst public:

- Town forums
- the web
- ACTV
- the Amherst Bulletin
- a speaker's bureau that would visit organizations such as PTO's

We next discussed agenda items for future meetings. They are as follows:

Agenda for August 14

1. School's additional budget and service projections
2. Economic development update
3. University/colleges and reimbursement for Town services
4. Questions to anticipated from the public
5. Report from the Outreach Committee

Future agenda items

- Report from the Data Analysis/Presentation Committee
- Approve July 31 minutes

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kathy Vorwerk Feldman